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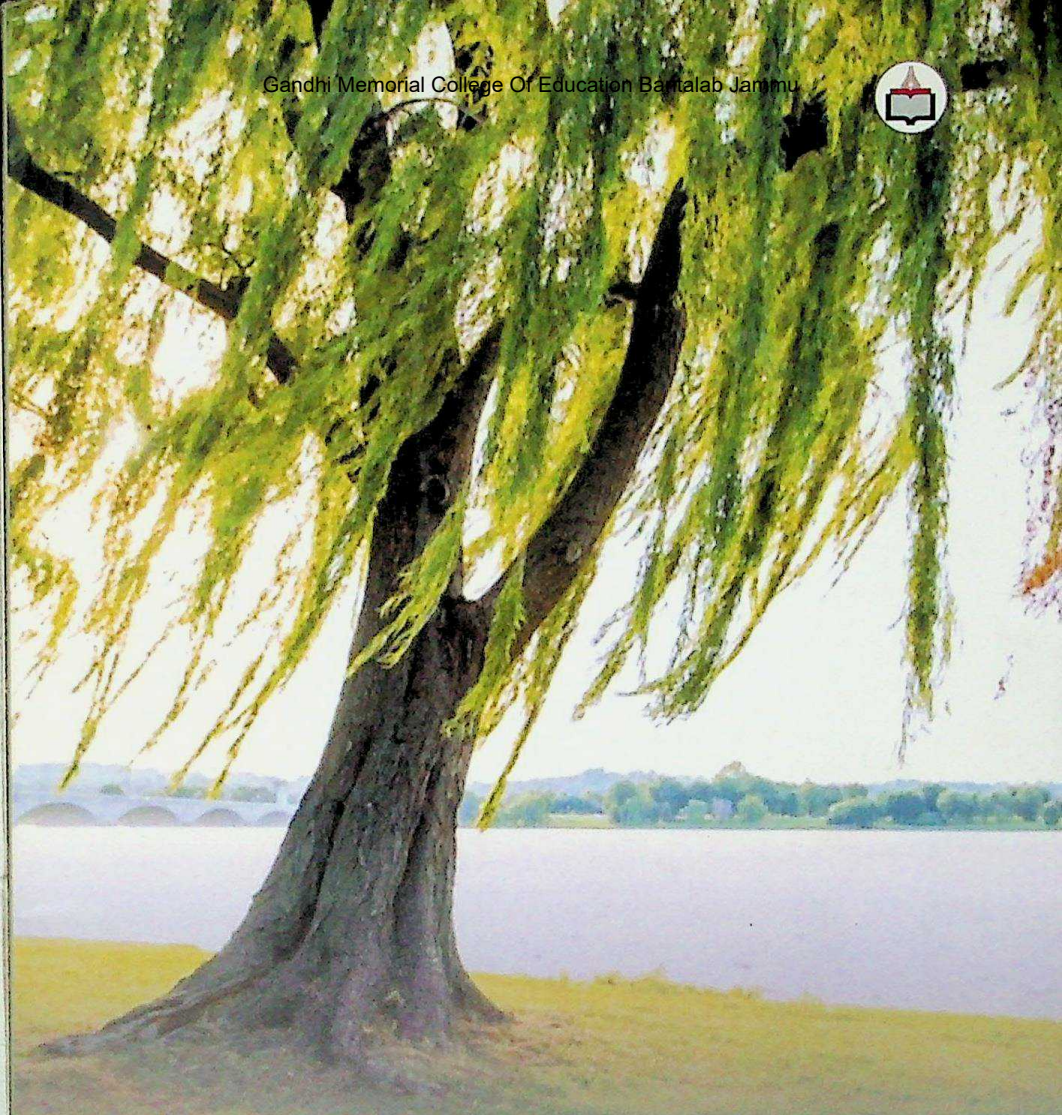

Reminiscence

My Seraphic Willows

AN UNBLEMISHED SOLITUDE

OMKAR SAFAPURI

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My dear Prof. Rawal
with my compliments &
good wishes

30/06/21

ONKAR.

G.M. College of Education
Raipur, Bantalab
Jammu.
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DEDICATED

In loving memory of my dear parents,

Spiritual Guru: Shiv Nandan Bhan

&

Dr. H. K Kaul

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To

Balasubramanain R
in admiration

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FOREWORD

The tale relates to the experience of an individual that can be identified by so many who have been put to similar situation. Having left forcibly from his place where he was born and brought up and was living for nearly fifty years has made him emotionally scarred. He with his family consisting of wife, young son, parents along with a helpful youngster had to leave his place on the dead of night fearing for life if he continued to live there.

Sharing what he has undergone through this un-told tale certainly will not make up for his loss. It would certainly open the eyes of so many like me to understand the seriousness of the situation that was existing when he had to take the decision to leave under threat of life.

On reading this tale one can certainly feel the emotions and fear experienced by the person and his family. They had to deal tactfully with the desperados occupying the home nearby.

I am sure those who go through this tale would wish all those that have suffered may have blessings of God to regain status in their place.

20/04/2021

Balasubramanian R
Bangalore, India

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PREFACE

It is a natural phenomenon when a person takes birth in a place which is called Motherland, loves & admires it unknowingly and if one loses it, becomes cognizant of this real fact. Birth place means to a person not merely land but its people, vibrant culture and overall an environment, which is inherited in the initial period of life when a person is free from inhibitions of life.

My birth place Srinagar, Kashmir where I lived 40 years has a long living history of 10,000 years way back when Lord Sri Rama was King of Ayodha, makes to remember my nurtured dreams now when I am in the process of self-discovery. The intrinsic emancipation comes when one is over with so called worldly obligations at some point of time and tries to pick up the loosens threads in order to tighten them to reach the desired goal of life.

In this amalgamation of thoughts, I recall my teenage ambition to build a small cottage, on the banks of serene Mansbal Lake around 27 Kms from Srinagar city, located in north Kashmir on a rectangular piece of land, covered with lush green willow trees spread in a row owned by my ancestors, once I attain a level of financial independence and contentment, remained un-fulfilled when parted away from Kashmir due to forced migration. My one more inherent desire was to spend my holidays & leisure time in the shadows of vastly populated chinar trees spread around divine spring known as Kheer Bhwani (Tulmullah), likely to remain now a wishful thinking. All these desires were manifestation of living a life at some point of time on its own terms, keeping in mind a Kashmir without environmental pollution and serenity.

The mixed feelings and un-fulfilled dreams are well represented in this book in a subtle form. Just before leaving my birthplace, horrendous experiences during March-April 1990,

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are still echoing in my subconscious state of mind, which is vividly reflected in this book.

Fundamental purpose of this book is to share with reader the learning experience during crises and its virtues to make life easier for combating dangers, which every person experiences in one way or the other in ones' life.

Omkar Safapuri

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CHAPTER 1

SADANAND MY SAVIOUR

After living for around 38 years in a down town where we had limited civic amenities and it would be a dream to live in civil lines, became a reality after constructing a new mansion in an upper middle class locality with a good urban outlook. Thanks to my acquaintances, who shifted to this new place prior to mine and inspired me to take this decision with a smile, in spite of scarcity of finances. A new house would mean lot to me and my family where air was not polluted and fresh vegetables could be picked up from our kitchen garden and fresh milk obtained from farm land.

The real glory of living into a healthy atmosphere was short lived as we had to abandon everything in our possession to our fate. During 1989 winter I ventured out to have holidays along with my family to deep down west to enjoy hot weather and to avoid some sort of civil commotion brewing in the Kashmir valley. Returning back after a month or so I encouraged my acquaintance's parents who were living nearby to visit their son who was in Gulf and old couple were happy to leave to escape the chilly winter ahead and secessionist activities that were getting foot-hold in Kashmir in a big way. They decided to leave for two to three months and gave us responsibility to take care of their maid servant, a Nepali-Bihari boy who was hardly 10 years old.

Within a fortnight after departure of old couple to Gulf, one Sunday morning Sadanand, maid servant came to our house when we were watching a famous Tele serial "Ramayana" and whispered to my spouse who was sitting beside me and vanished

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within few minutes. My spouse took me to another room in panic to avoid my parents on the briefing by Sadanand.

Sadanand had told regarding an anonymous phone call he received in the morning and enquiring about his master's travel plan to Gulf and tentative return date for which he informed caller that they will be back in a month's time and further caller directed him to keep main gate of the house open in the evening as they are freedom fighters would like to stay in house for a night or so and asked him to keep this phone call confidential, failing which he has to face bullets.

The phone call by the unidentified person to Sadanand was with confidence and calmness. After hearing this news, I got quite panicky as this event would have direct bearing on our safety since people around knew our warm friendly association with the owner of the house. This area was quiet and free from hullabaloo of city. Owner of house was quite popular in the locality because of his friendly attitude towards his neighbors. The house had aesthetic look, three stories house, centrally located with a British architectural value, a unique in the vicinity and this would attract on lookers to see it very closely.

Since the matter was serious and quite panicky, I shared this news with my parents and sought their opinion as how to go about. We jointly decided to shift our ten year old son, 5th standard student to our old down town house where my uncle was living. While discussing this issue, my wife told quite some time back one lady neighbor had casually requested her not to allow our son to come out in open for playing without our company as there are chances some disgruntled elements may harm him and my wife had not taken this so seriously, so this apprehension forced us to shift our son to some safer place. My father took him to down town on the same day without revealing the real reason for this temporary shift. Our son was quite happy to go out after a long time with his grandfather without knowing the reality.

During day time, my spouse took stock of situation in acquaintances house and tried to keep things in order to make a

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good space for unwanted guests. We ensured Sadanand comes our home early before dusk to pack his dinner so that he could go back to his place to welcome unknown visitor. Normally, he would come every evening to our home around 8 in the night and would go back home for night stay after having his dinner. This evening he left only at 6 in the evening with packed dinner.

Whole night was sleepless for all of us namely self, my wife and parents, praying almighty to save life of Sadanand and ours as well. There was a curiosity, lull and anxious moments till we could see face of Sadanand next day morning. We would expect Sadanand to come to our house early morning at around 7 but till 9 we couldn't see even his glimpse. By then my dear father had climbed five to ten times to attic of our house with the hope he could see Sadanand's movement in his house.

Between morning 08 to 09, it was a moment of despair till we found Sadanand coming towards our house slowly and my father became hysterical with melted eyes. Once Sadanand entered our house gate, we all pondered on him with hugs & kisses. Finally, we made him to sit in some comfortable position and were curious to know from him, first night's tale.

We asked him the reason for his late coming as it was already 9.15 in the morning. After a pause, he replied, he couldn't get up early as he was awake till 4 in the morning. Thereafter, he revealed a saga of that night right from 6 in the previous evening till 4 in the early next morning.

Firstly, one person came at around 6 in the evening and stayed in the living room and the next person joined him at late night around 9 and by then he requested the first person to have some tea etc. but he declined and was just mum and watching TV. Once next person joined him, then both became inquisitive to know the details of house and inspected all rooms in ground floor which were without locks. They wanted to see other rooms in 1st floor as well but could not see as they were locked. Finally, they asked him to sit outside room as a guard without sleeping and instructed very clearly not to reveal any body about their presence in house. More than that, they did ask him when his

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master will be back from Gulf, to which he replied after one month.

It seems, they were not sleeping as he could see vividly because they kept door partially closed. At around 4 in the morning they suddenly got up and asked him to guide them up to rear main gate of the house and left from there. While leaving they slapped on his face mildly to give him an impression not to be loose talker and informed him that they will be again coming next evening at around 6.

Sadanand was nervous and tired due to night's strain and slept after having breakfast. His somber and numbness behavior added to our concern as how to deal with this explosive situation especially it was getting clear these guys will be continuing to use this house as safe heaven to avoid law forcing authorities.

We became panicky because of the fact that all people in the vicinity knew very well that we are custodians of this house till the owner is out of station and also caretaker of Sadanand, due to our close association with the owners of this mansion.

At around noon when Sadanand woke-up after a brief spell of sleep, he was looking a bit relaxed and confidant to deal with situation. He had his lunch nicely and later went to his house to clean up the rooms, which he would do normally every day. My wife asked him to come by 4 in the evening for having tea etc. and then to leave back by 5.30 as those days evenings used to set in early, maximum by 6 due to winter.

During the day, I was restless as how to deal with this situation because we were caught in this melodrama unaware and it was grave danger to our lives as such, would not risk discussing this situation with anybody, except my father. In the meantime, some idea flashed me to see that Sadanand's moral is boosted as he was the only one who could be a mono stage actor but unfortunately too young to understand this entire situation. This made me to realise that we only shall have to do something to save ourselves along with Sadanand and that goal became an energy booster for us to deal with this complex situation. By the

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time my wife packed dinner for Sadanad for carrying to his home, I requested all my family members viz my parents, wife & Sadanand to come in drawing room to share with them some important information before Sadanand would leave for his home.

We decided between 5.30 to 5.40 pm, he should be in his house as his unwanted guests had told him that they would be there around 6.30 in the evening. This urgent meeting was chaired by me the way we discuss a business strategy in our corporate world and requested everybody to share their opinion as how to deal with this situation.

My father was of the opinion that we should inform police through some neighbor or relative while as, my mother said safety was important for all of us and was worried about her grandson, whom we had shifted to our uncle's place in down town. My spouse was upset, because one could make out she was feeling guilty as the whole episode was centered on acquaintances due to her close relation with them than us. To my surprise, Sadanand was optimistic as nothing will happen and was ready to deal with them, due to his sheer obedience.

After listening to everybody, I spoke with some authority and requested my family to wait for final decision, which could be taken next day after knowing that night's experience and requested Sadanand to be humble and cooperate with unwanted guests and not to reveal this episode to anybody. Also, advised my family that the whole episode shall have to be kept absolutely confidential in case we want to see ourselves alive and requested everybody to vouch for this promise though my father accepted it reluctantly. The meeting lasted for just 15 minutes as time was running short to say goodbye to Sadanand who became our hero now. All of us came to main gate of the house to say him goodbye till next morning, hugged him and prayed to God to see him once again here next morning.

We had our dinner silently, looking at each other with desperation as everybody was thinking on 3 counts, Sadanand's life, our lives and our 9 year old son, who was forcefully

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spending second night in my uncle's house, with whom he had never stayed before. During night time, I quietly went to my father's bedroom and saw him awake and sitting in a prayer posture reciting "Hanuman Chaleasa" 108 times, keeping a track of its numerical counts on finger tips. That night was a sleepless night for all of us and we must have slept hardly for 1-2 hrs. and when I came out of my bed room at dawn, saw my father coming down from stair case after having a look from our 2nd floor of the vulnerable house just to have glimpse of Sadanand.

He was disappointed as no traces of Sadanand could be seen by him. I requested him not to worry and let us wait till 9 in the morning as per yesterday's experience and by then we could have our normal chores. We had our breakfast at around 8 and it was little in a relaxed way and could talk to each other freely after a gap of around 48 hrs. Once 9 in the morning approached, my father started getting restless, even he would peep towards main gate after every 10 minutes especially when door would make some feeble noise due to wind vibrations looking as if somebody had opened the door.

Once clock passed 9, the whole family started getting eager to have glimpse of Sadanand but the time passed, no traces of the hero. Now all of us started getting worried and every minute looked to be moment of anxiety. Around 5 minutes to ten, my father told me that we should now go to the house to collect dead body of Sadanand and the question raised how to inform police in case it would have been a reality. As we were discussing same, Sadanand appeared inside our house. Everybody hugged him and made him to sit but he was looking little weak and distressed. We made him to drink a cup of lukewarm milk and were waiting impatiently for him to say something.

Finally after a gap of around 15 minutes, he started speaking with a feeble voice and wet eyes that he was now getting afraid of this situation as they did not allow him to sleep till 4 in the morning and instructed him to sit in lobby and not to come near their room

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It seems, that day there were three persons, only one person he could see from last night's lot and other two were new faces. He also had seen in their room some guns placed in a row and wrapped in brown paper which were kept in a standing position towards wall. It looks the guns were AK-47 rifles, the description he gave to me later in detail. Thereafter, he was asked to show kitchen and were inclined to see rooms in 1st floor but could not do so as rooms were locked. They insisted him to get the keys but he told them that since he had not to use those rooms so the owner had taken keys along with them. They were not happy with his assenting response and held him by his neck and dashed against stone wall in lobby. Luckily, he was not hurt much but due to fear, he was smeared and frightened.

At this point of time, he was forcefully and clearly advised not to reveal anything to anybody otherwise his dead body would be thrown out of window. Exactly at 4 in the morning, he was called by name and asked to accompany them up to main gate and informed him that they would be coming again latest by 6.30 in the evening.

This whole story made us jittery especially after hearing the demand for keys which were handed over to my wife by old couple and it looked, these guys were trying to use pressure tactics with this boy to get hold of keys. We feared once they try to molest the boy in a rude way to get hold of keys, we could have become direct victim to this whole episode.

Said development became a turning point for this unfolding trauma. Now, we were also concerned after knowing about new faces coming everyday and out of old group, only one would be present. I could get the feeling of their sinister design to make this big house a shelter for a nefarious design by some militant organisation who were operating in Kashmir to create havoc and working for secessionism. It was well thought plan to avoid law enforcing agencies in a deceitful manner.

This made me very upset as such, started becoming nervous as how to deal with this situation because our lives were at risk. Various questions were cropping in my mind being the only

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person in the family who could assess the catastrophe in totality like should we inform police directly or through some body, would it be correct to inform police at this stage then our lives may be more vulnerable because we could get the feeling that outside environment was also hostile and inimical to our interests. At this point, we took a decision to experience one more night.

We left Sadanand to have his sleep more comfortably after his breakfast while as, we were grabbling with uncertainty and anxiety. Our child's absence was giving us more discomfort emotionally but one way we were happy he was out of scene. Day passed without any notice and evening was giving us call to prepare Sadanand for one more night. We were now feeling guilty to send this young orphan boy to kiss the death and accordingly was making us more susceptible to our inner conscious and burdening our tender hearts heavy with melancholic feelings.

As usual, Sadanand was ready around 6.30 in the evening with his dinner packed in lunch box to face third ordeal night and all of us said good bye to him near the main gate of our house which we normally do when our close relative leaves us for a long time.

We had a quite dinner at around 8.30 in night and thereafter my parents and we parted away to our respective bedrooms. Since, my father was a devotee of Lord Hanuman and he would chant Mantra throughout night passionately for the safety of all of us which we could listen feebly at late night.

My father as usual, had gone to top floor of our house to look for Sadanand in the early morning, when the birds start chirping. Jokingly, I asked him whether he was able to see Sadanand in his compound, which we could view distantly. But to our surprise, that morning at around 8 we could see Sadanand in our house with a little smile on his face which made us also happy and thereafter we asked him the reason for coming early on that day.

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For the first time Sadanand started narrating story of that night without any discomfort. It seems, this time there were 6 persons who came almost around 7 in the previous night and they were entering inside home one by one after a gap of 5-10 minutes. By 8 in the night everybody started watching TV keeping their door closed partially for the first time.

Surprisingly, out of 6 persons only one was from previous night's batch. It looked out of these 6 persons, one was a team leader who it seems, was quite courteous and came near to Sadanand and asked him when his master was expected to come back, for this he replied approximately after one month. Thereafter, that person told him to inform them at least 2 days in advance so that they could make some other arrangement. This made Sadanand little happy and offered him to have some water or tea which he declined. Other 5 guys were in the room watching television. Team leader gave concession to Sadanand to sleep on the verandah of first floor but cautioned him not to disturb them. In the morning at around 4 they called him up by name and advised to keep the main door closed. So that night Sadanand had good sleep, which made him to come our home early in the morning.

This narration gave us some respite on two folds, firstly they wanted to stay only till the owner would be back and secondly, Sadanand committed to them innocently that his owner will come back after one month though he himself was not so clear when they were actually returning back. This day we had a good lunch and now started preparing to join our respective jobs from next day morning.

My father took liberty to visit his brother's house in down town to get our son back who was shifted there to avoid this uncertainty. More than that, we as a family vowed to keep this whole episode under wraps and absolutely confidential even with our 10 year old son who could be susceptible to leakage due to his absolute innocence in that tender age. We requested Sadanand to be more careful while talking to our son as both

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were almost of same age. Also, we cautioned him not to speak to any of his neighbor or nearby shopkeeper on this issue.

After this revelation, I discussed with my father that we should take calculated risk in keeping this whole gamut of happenings in the most confidential manner and probably that is the only option left to us to save our lives.

In the evening all of us were mildly jubilant as our son joined us after a gap of 3 days and my wife prepared as usual Sadanand for next night's episode without much emotional farewell as we had to pose in a normal situation otherwise our son would become privy to all these happenings for which we were very careful. Sadanand left home by 6.30 in the evening and this time I took courage to join him till the main gate of his house, which was around 3-5 minutes' walk from our home.

Next day morning we all were trying to get ready to attend our works except my mother and son who had to be in-house as my mother was a house wife and son's school was closed due to winter vacations. But our cautious and excruciating wait for Sadanand was binding us to have half-hearted approach for getting ourselves ready.

My father went upstairs number of times to have glimpse of Sadanand but finally around 8.15 in the morning he came down hastily from 2nd story to inform us that Sadanand was approaching towards our house. We all became alert and ready to receive him so that we could take him to drawing room which was little distant from the bedroom of our son where he was sleeping and 8 am in winter would not be considered too late, especially for a young lad like him.

I tried to whisper with Sadanand and requested other members not to bother him for the time being and they went to their respective rooms with ease.

To my surprise, Sadanand informed me that their phone has been disconnected and the long wire which was connecting their phone from pole was hanging around on their house. Also, there was further addition to our nightmare after knowing that last

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night there were 10 persons, out of which he could notice only one person from previous night's group and rest all were new faces.

It seems, all of them had guns with them which they exhibited openly and kept in lobby in a row just outside their room. This time they were all gossiping and viewing television leisurely. No body spoke to him and as usual, he went to his resting place which was located on middle of staircase from where he could look towards compound of his house through glass panes. In fact, this place was chosen by one of those men for Sadanand's resting place, most probably by a team leader.

This narration was a concern for us, which would mean that we were dealing with a unified militant organisation as we used to know through print & electronic media about those outfits on daily basis and their gruesome killings of innocent lives.

I didn't share this news with my father and spouse in fact, advised them to join their respective offices and even I also left for my work. To my surprise, at my work place there was thin attendance and it was looking a war like situation where everybody was concerned about one's own safety and some people were shyly expressing their despicable pleasure while as, no work was going on.

Now, I was convinced that our days are numbered and grumbling within myself to find answers for our decision to keep the daily terrible happenings purely confidential but simultaneously assuming if all of us are killed by those militants, then nobody in this world would come to know the real truth.

This question started bothering me in office almost from 11 am till 3 pm and then suddenly decided to share this information with two persons, firstly, with my boss who was head of the Institution and secondly, one of my colleague who was my close friend, a well-wisher and more than that he was quite articulate, a wise person who could be trusted. My intention was not to take their counsel for this problem but to keep them informed in

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case we are killed in doubtful circumstances, then what could be the reason.

I went to my boss's chamber who was an alien to our place but was well aware of the happenings around and shared this news with him in a very confidential way. Since the whole business had come to standstill, he was able to hear me patiently for a long time.

He appreciated my approach and promised to keep this whole affair within himself. Thereafter, went to my colleagues' chamber who was also freely available, repeated the same happenings to him.

He also promised to keep this whole affair confidential. He was so generous that he promised that this information would never be shared by him even with his family members due to the fact, being a local guy, our purpose could have hampered.

After sharing our ordeal, I was little relieved as my heart was feeling lighter by exchanging some views with those two persons for the first time after this event took place. By the time I reached home in the evening, Sadanand was packing his bag to get ready for one more night. He left hurriedly for home as it was getting little late.

After around one hour my spouse suddenly realised that Sadanand had missed to carry vegetable curry in hurry and the box was left in our home. She requested me to go to his house and handover to him near his gate, I acceded to her request and went to Sadanand's house to deliver the tiny box. As usual, knocked the main gate which was bolted from inside even though, it was hardly 6.30 in the evening, Sadanand came out and got baffled to see me near his home at an odd hour. As soon as he came near the main gate, he cautioned me in a feeble voice not to come inside as the stranger was already there who had instructed not to allow anybody inside house. On hearing this, I virtually got shivered and handed over bag to him. He bounced on the bag and requested me to leave immediately. I was little stunned with his body language, fearing some more trouble in

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store for him and for myself as well for getting suddenly exposed before them.

After reaching back home, I was little harsh to my spouse as why she failed in packing complete dinner pack for Sadanand resulting in this exposure with disgruntled lumpen. Her eyes got wet with my hysterical behavior but soon realised the niceties of situation. I was sure, that night would be heavy for Sadanand and equally tense for us as well. Gloom spread across our home as we can't speak openly, just to make sure that our son should know nothing about this situation. But he could hardly understand anything by our whispers, because he was too young & innocent to understand all this nonsense.

Night passed in tension and now again as usual, wait for Sadanand started. Around 9.30 morning, we could see Sadanand limping towards our house gesticulated by my father, who was watching him from 1st floor like a capitulated person. After seeing Sadanand's face, we could make out something more had happened that night but how to ask him and whispered around everybody not to disturb him for the moment. By this time, my father and wife had to leave for their offices while as, I had already planned to abandon my day's work, due to last evening's happening. So, things got settled in an hour or so and by the time it was around 10.30 in the morning and luckily, our son was outside playing cricket with our neighbor's kids, as such, got an opportunity to speak to Sadanand every detail of last night's happenings.

During my close door meeting with him, firstly he gave me a shock by saying that there were around 15 persons and could get sense that out of whole lot, only one person was from last night's batch and rest were altogether new faces and they were speaking in broken Hindustani and not a local language. The person who had come early last evening was also a new face. I was firstly curious to know the person's reaction after my proxy encounter last evening. It seems, the person had instructed him in general not to allow me inside the house fearing for an unknown face.

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He himself had gone to first floor to avoid me in case had I entered in the house.

During that night at around 10.30 some 2-3 person approached Sadanand and asked him to handover keys of all rooms located on 1st & 2nd floor. He told them that keys are not with him as his master had not given him any keys of those rooms when they left for abroad trip. With this argument, they were not happy and pushed him by holding his neck, banged his forehead against stone wall which lead to few minor bruises on his forehead and while doing so, the young boy had wept which made them to withdraw.

Now that night's tale had added new dimension to this saga and was getting worried as Sadanand should not spell the beans because keys were with us and by any chance if he would be forced to speak the truth, we could get directly exposed to this new dimension & more than that those guys would think that we had tutored Sadanand on this issue as such, there was great danger to our lives.

Whole day was spent by me in desperation as was virtually feeling alone now ignoring the presence of my mother, son & Sadanand. I was waiting for my father & spouse to share this information and more so they also would have been curious to know the last night's tale.

In the meantime, I was trying to visualise this whole saga in totality as things were now getting clear along with the intention of those brutal guys. In fact, we had to fight this battle now with not any individual but with some hidden organised militia.

After deliberating, I could see some silver lining in this whole episode that assuming we would be successful in getting our acquaintances back just after completion of one month as Sadanand had indicated to those guys that his master would be back after one month. It was presumed ring leader had sarcastically told Sadanand that once his master is back, they would leave the place provided, they were informed well in

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advance but his phraseology was not so clear, assuming to be positive only.

Once my father and spouse joined me in the evening, shared with them individually this whole situation as jointly it was not possible for us to hold a meeting fearing our son should not get even a glimpse of this whole happening.

After cutting phone line and a huge influx of persons coming daily would mean that we could also be potential targets and time was tickling on us. It was making us to shiver through our nerves with a go getting attitude. My father would ponder on me in a hushed voice that we should share this information with our near & dear ones as they may find some solution to save us. He was feeling more disillusioned as we had strictly instructed him not to speak with our neighbor, a close family to us as we would often visit each other's home. This relation further deepened due to frequent curfews & unrest in the city and debating uncertainty of our well-being in the valley was the only hot topic to discuss.

An idea flashed to me to approach one of our close relative who was working for a telephone company and to meet him urgently in his office located in the main city and explore from him, if he could contact our acquaintances in Gulf and impress upon them to return home within one month, due to some urgency.

We all agreed this idea and next morning myself and my father met him in his office and requested for this favor and virtually begged him to keep this matter highly confidential even with Gulf acquaintances. We could have contacted this gentleman on phone, which was available within our vicinity but we feared our conversation should not get leaked and put us in more danger. We also conveyed to him to give them our neighbor's phone number, since their home phone was made deliberately non-functional by intruders.

It was a very tricky situation as how to get our acquaintances convinced about their early return program and at the same time, our phone conversation had to be highly lucid so

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that they should not get even a blink of our situation, which we never wanted to convey. We were convinced that phone conversation was getting tapped by some people in telephone department, who could be helping in-directly militant organisations operating in the valley. Had we not followed this strategy, we would have fallen in the trap, making us to get death warrant?

After few days, we got a phone call from our acquaintances from Gulf on our neighbor's phone and as usual, exchanged verbal pleasantries and asked them when they are likely to come home and on this they replied after summer sets in Kashmir, that was somewhere May, 1990. We requested them to come early as we are missing them especially, their Sadanand was feeling alone. Somehow, the phone line got disconnected which we assume was done deliberately by somebody who was not interested that we should impress upon them to come home early. This made us further nervous, fearing we were surely vulnerable to some harm. It was a mental torture for all of us and nobody would speak openly because firstly we never wanted to give feeling that we were in panic and secondly we had restriction of utmost secrecy.

Next day, Sadanand came as usual, in the morning but his body language was disturbing and it was gradually receding. But, I was watchful and would ask him in private the night's story. He told us the number was increasing every day and only one person of last batch could be seen next night. We could make out that desperados had adopted a very viable strategy, not to keep their folks in one place and only the person who would come two times was a sort of guide to show them the way. Ironically, they would not touch anything in the house, not even a glass of water and next day early morning at 4 they would vanish from rear main gate. The methodology adopted by desperados, we thought has worked out for them.

It was looking these intruders were keeping close eye on our moments as I used to travel by my institutions transport on daily basis, but due to some inconvenience, one day I took out my car

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which was parked in the garage of the same house and drove to Institution. On the same night Sadanand was asked to explain how the vehicle had gone out during the day for that he had quoted my name innocently. After hearing this, it was obvious that I was being watched by those guys and would mean danger. This development put me in back foot.

In the meantime, we got one more phone call from Gulf advising us to leave for plains in order to avoid present unrest in the valley and come back after 2-3 months. With this conversation, we could feel that they had no idea about our turmoil and were absolutely not aware what was happening with their Sadanand while as, their house was allegedly being used by militants for their ulterior motives & nefarious design, which was illegal and punishable under law of the land.

We were passing through two edged sword, firstly, if we contact police or take them into confidence, there were chances of falling in the trap of being informers and those guys could kill us and secondly, if we continue in the same way, then we would have been always vulnerable to desperados as well to law enforcing agencies. It was peculiar & unpredictable situation. Even there were reports some other pro-elements were favoring openly the cause of militant organisations.

Now Sadanand's worry was getting manifold on daily basis and every day he was being harassed and tortured for getting the house keys. They were beating him with the buttocks of guns and smashing his head against stone wall. It seems, they were now desperate to occupy more rooms and by then their number had reached to thirty per night. We were getting afraid by hearing the word "Keys" which would mean "death trap" for us.

While struggling on this issue, one day my father suddenly became hysterical in a lament mood and shouted at me that our acquaintances have forced us to this situation and suppose if those militants kill us, there would be nobody even to perform our last rites. Due to fear & frustration, he suggested in a forceful way that we should hire a taxi and run away to Jammu during night, leaving Sadanand to his fate in house. On hearing this

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painful suggestion, myself and my spouse were cursing our fate & destiny due to the fact, the whole family was vulnerable to a close death threat.

Next day, my father approached me after completing his daily morning prayers with a sober voice & all seriousness, put a proposal that myself, my spouse and son should immediately hire a taxi and leave for Jammu in the night while as, he along with my mother would stay back to take care of Sadanand, his belongings and expressed his readiness to face those disgruntled elements, if required. He was working on logic that an old couple has seen their days and showed his readiness to face the worst in case it comes in this way and at least with this action, he would be able to save young lives and a bubbling lad.

On hearing this suggestion, I requested my father to give me some time to think on this proposal, which he didn't like and nodded his head in anger and left the scene.

Now almost a week had passed with sleepless nights especially for my dear father who would always be chanting Mantras and praying to almighty for safeguarding the lives of at least young people in the family including Sadanand. This made me to realise that as a young male member in the family, shall have to take a final call but was buying some time consciously and praying for positive information from Gulf about early return of old couple, our acquaintance.

In this course of messy situation, we got again a phone call from Gulf on our neighbor's phone after couple of days and this was first time I could directly speak to all members of acquaintance. The youngest member of this family repeatedly requested me to leave everything there and not to bother about anything. Since lives are precious, please leave for Delhi or Jammu where safety was ensured.

We were scared to speak to them openly on phone, as we were sure our phone conversation was being heard by somebody who were interested in our affair. However, I could get a courage to inform this person who was a decision maker by

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virtue of his age, was told that my employer has transferred my services to some odd location outside valley and we are completely winding out from here so his parents return is important to hand over them their house etc. for which we were temporary custodians. Somehow, the concerned person was not convinced with my argument and was insisting that we should lock their house and leave for safe place along with Sadanand and on hearing this I had to shout on him in frustration and bang the phone.

I could realise later that the person understood the murky situation of the place based on my conversation, feedback gathered from Indian media and from his other relatives & friends who were spread across India and abroad. Due to this dreadful situation, he never wanted to depart his aged parents to valley to put their life in jeopardy. But to our good luck, this long conversation made some divine sense to old couple who were quite experienced and could feel something fussy with us and asked their son to reserve their tickets back to Kashmir against his wishes due to unfavorable situation prevailing at that point of time. We requested to reserve tickets for a particular date which would approximately coincide with the date that Sadanand had committed to uninvited persons innocently some days before.

This development took place within 3-4 days and was encouraged to have some final decision in consultation with my father. So, we jointly decided to bear this agony till owners of the house arrive and hoping that we might get relieved of this situation which we were undergoing by proxy. Probably, we had no other option. Assuming we would have left in some vehicle during day time, we could have been caught by the militants somewhere on the way as their network was very strong. We didn't want to leave during night because then Sadanand would have been left behind. Leaving Sadanand alone to his fate was not acceptable to us.

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This decision was taken based on our positive thinking, calculated risk and study of behavior of the militants, looking at that moment a win-win situation.

Things went smoothly for a week or so and we also became used to get hold of the situation by nature's apathy. In the meantime, every day Sadanand would inform us about the number of people increasing on daily basis, which had reached now 60 persons per night and it was difficult for him to take their count. The synonymous was that new faces used to visit every night while as, one militant would join them from previous night's batch, as a guide.

One day there was panic in the city and everybody would get trapped in misinformation campaign and carry unbelievable stories by proxy while as, some people were doing it for the sake of pleasure. This action was looking to me an orchestrated move by some people who had an agenda to make things messy for the administrative authorities.

On the same evening Sadanand went as usual to his house at around 6.30 with his packed dinner and we thought it would be same night as usual. But, around 10.30 in the night which is unusual time for somebody to press the call bell of your house especially in this panic/dangerous situation & amidst cold breeze of severe winter, as such, it was scary to open the door. We took it far granted that militants must have killed Sadanand and now it will be our turn to say good bye to this tiny world.

Due to this fearful situation, my spouse, with choked voice and tears in eyes, asked me what to do now and in the mean, my father started pleading with both of us to get ourselves locked in bathroom, so that we are saved and he and my mother become targets of militants. Our son was sleeping and was pushed to kitchen wardrobe by my father without disturbing him. It was a highest order of our agony thinking now our time has come to get killed. Suddenly to our surprise, Sadanand called and asked us to open the gate as he himself was standing there to convey some important information. My father who was a divine soul, was prepared to face the first bullet, hurriedly pushed me & my

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spouse to bathroom and bolted us from outside, then went to first floor to check-up about the number of people standing with Sadanand, before opening the main gate.

He was delighted to see Sadanand alone, hurriedly came down, opened the main gate and thereafter, asked my mother to allow us to come out from bathroom, where we were locked. Sadanand came in and we asked him with melancholy feelings about the reason for coming so late to our house, he innocently said that there was an announcement just now on private public address system that people should not drink water from tapes as government has mixed poison with water to kill people en-mass supporting cause of those people who are working audaciously to dismember Kashmir from rest of India. After knowing this, he thought to keep us informed, so that we don't drink tap water. In order to come to our place, he had taken permission from his un-wanted guests who were around 60 numbers on that day. Even though, he was given permission, but was ordered to return fast.

At that moment, there was a great respite for us but in a huff, my father virtually pushed him back to home without wasting a minute. We were lull for some time after Sadanand's departure and later retired to our bedrooms. Next day, I understood from my father, that he had a sound sleep for the first time after 2 weeks.

The next day morning was looking somewhat better after a long spell of agony and Sadanad's presence in the early morning was bright with mild sun appearing. After a long time, we all had a good breakfast in the morning.

While having breakfast, we again got sudden call from Gulf after a gap of few days now confirming about their departure date which would coincide about our action plan. This added flavor to our good day. There was almost about 15 day's gap for the arrival of the Sadanad's owners.

It was looking pleasing & refreshing after almost 3 weeks that we could have our normal chores of life and breathe freely after hearing old couple was finally returning home from Gulf.

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Psychological pressure was building on me for orchestrating this strategy for requesting owners to come back before their planned schedule and defying my father's plea for running away. At the same time, I was not sure about the real plan of this psychopath group.

It was now almost daily routine for Sadanand to get harassed both emotionally & physically by those people who were probably working on two theories, one to keep Sadanand under tremendous pressure so that he does not reveal the real story to any body and second to convey us indirectly to handover house keys, which they were suspecting were with us.

Sadanand's innocence was making us to feel vulnerable in case he would spell the beans under torture and reveal about the location of keys, which we were holding but at the same time his determination to withstand the torture was giving us some respite though it was indirect torture for us as well.

In a way, we were fighting undeclared war of nerves with those guys on daily basis. As a strategy, I would meet Sadanand in some separate corner of my house for about half an hour on daily basis before he would depart for one more fateful night. This meeting would be one to one basis. He was being motivated to face various techniques of torture tactfully including sexual harassment.

Since the number of intruders was on rise steadily, it was obvious, they were interested in occupying 2nd floor of the house and now around seventy five persons were taking shelter on daily basis. Also, Sadanand had overheard that they were interested in putting some communication center on 2nd floor which needed antenna to get connected during night to interact with their masters across the border. During our break-fast meetings, we would hear from Sadanand the minutest details he would hear during the night which was helping us for altering our strategy on daily basis. Virtually it was a mind game!

To our good luck, Sadanand was becoming determined & firm with every torture, bold to face them and more than that he

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was convinced that he has to save us including himself. The time had made him smart to play to their diktats. I would observe it on daily basis which would make me to feel little comfortable. Days passed, our son Deepak would go to their house during sunny winter days to play cricket with Sadanand and other children who were living nearby. In a way, we were encouraging them tactfully to play cricket so that intruders would get an impression that we are not nervous and at the same time we endorse their hide out. In a way it was looking a win-win situation for both parties.

We were getting amazed to see Sadanand getting matured day-by-day more than his age as he never disclosed anything about this episode to our child even though they were almost of the same age group playing together and allow him to move freely in their house.

Before lunch, he used to keep house in order which was getting messy with influx of such large gathering during night. One could not imagine that 10 year old Sadanand would clean two toilets, one big sitting room, drawing & dining room, kitchen, stair case and verandah within one to two hours so that nothing in the house should look untoward in case some guest comes during day time as around 75 intruders used to stay every day during night in a deceitful manner.

It was sheer determination and goodwill which was carrying on 10 year Sadanand, hardly sleeping 2-3 hours during night and thereafter used to have a nap for an hour or so at our place. Though all of us had melted down but after seeing & experiencing positive attitude of this young lad, we tried to learn from him to live life with purpose.

In our family, my father was most benefited as he got inspiration from positive attitude of this boy who was illiterate, not seen even iota of love from his parents or any relation and a dismal childhood. Initially out of frustration, my father was forcing us to debunk him in order to save our lives but slowly became his darling.

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One day during this course of apathy, we suddenly realised the role of Sadanand to whom we started addressing "Sada" which in Hindi means pure & simple, with such perseverance and endurance should become a guiding force for us to believe in positive attitude, sacrifice and love. Believe me, I discovered in the real sense true meaning of these three buzz words, which we knew but never practiced in reality.

This saga was getting unfolded slowly and started getting the real feel of these beautiful words "Sacrifice & Love" made us to resolute with the help of these novices, which gave us strength to attend our daily chores in a normal way and to be calm even though it was a biggest risk to our entire family.

When one surrenders to almighty and manifests calmness, it is altogether a different feeling. Each day was somehow being managed with divine solace. Now new challenge was approaching fast, the date of arrival of our guests from Gulf. As the date of arrival was coming near it would look last scene of this live drama.

Now, the challenge was as how Sadanand has to inform those intruders about arrival of owners within 5-6 days as their ring leader had asked him to inform them at least one week in advance. So we calculated the right day to prepare him to inform them about the arrival date and started the process for new battle. Next evening when this boy left for informing the date, it was a special evening for all us to say good bye to him and to follow a ritual which normally is being done for a family member who leaves for some special assignment for a good cause.

It was again a sleepless night for all of us, and we were praying individually without making any formal gestures. May God save us!

As usual, my father would start going up to attic at the start of dawn to have glimpse of Sadanand and his frustration started when there was no indication till 8.30 am. He was desperate and now pressurising me that we should visit the house to find

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whether any untoward incident has taken place. I was pleading with him to wait till 9 in the morning but he argued audaciously while as, internally, we were all down apprehending some grave mishap.

Ultimately, with our nervousness, we both started going towards his house, praying to God to give us strength to sustain any mishap. While we were about to reach there, we saw Sadanand coming towards our house and as usual, with his slow steps & grim face. We were apparently happy to see him live in one piece and mockingly pushed him one side. He calmly informed they have agreed to leave prior to one night of owners' arrival. We were delighted to hear this news. I rushed running towards my house leaving my father & Sadanand who were a bit slow as was curious to share this news with my mother & spouse.

All of us hugged him and on enquiring about his late coming than usual he replied that last night he slept very late and then they made him to get up at 3 in the morning.

I was nervous & skeptical about this news from Sadanand but could not press him to share more at that time as he was looking exhausted and tormented. Around noon after Sadanand's nap, tried to get more explicit information from him about last night's encounter which was crucial for our survival. He said around 9 O'clock he conveyed to desperados his owner has sent a message about their arrival on 14th March, 1990 by the morning flight.

It seems, out of the group, one young boy emerged instantly and took him to corner of the lounge as to what exactly he wanted to convey. To this Sadanand replied that one of his team members had asked him to inform them two days in advance about the arrival date of house owners.

After listening quietly to him, he went inside the room and came back after 5 minutes and told him fine, no problem they would not come to this house from 13th March onwards and the key which they had taken of the rear main gate would be handed

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over to him on the same day. After seeking this information, I could sense that the young guy must have talked to his master on satellite phone about this matter and got his approval as those days there were no mobile phones and even land line of this house was disconnected by those intruders at the start of this occurrence.

On that day there were around 75 persons hiding in this hideout and surprisingly there was no harsh treatment to Sadanand, seemed to be everything was going as per text book calculation.

It was virtually excitement for all of us. After a long gap, we had a good festive dinner on that day and now started waiting for 14th March, 1990. Hardly 5 days were left for this big day and even then we would count days one by one and were feeling as if the time had stopped.

14th March, 1990, Wednesday is a historical day for me & my family and would never be forgotten till end of our lives. Truly speaking, it is a day of culmination of an unforgettable journey with a cause of skepticism and sacrifice.

The identified date was a puzzle, either happening for good or end of our lives. More worry was that I had coaxed one old couple to get trapped in this misadventure and was also putting their life in jeopardy. This was the biggest undeclared challenge for me, probably would have made my blood pressure to fluctuate in a big way and its impact was seen after many years but at that time it was un-noticed.

On 12th March, 1990, Sadanand went as usual with his packed dinner at around 6.30 in the evening. Now count down had started, we briefed him fully before his departure to make him aware as how to deal in case he feels worst has come.

The boy was innocent because of his young age; not knowing could face a bullet which was a matter of deep concern for all of us. He was taught to surrender almighty, start reciting 'Hanuman Chalisa' which we had practiced with him for one month and to do this subtle divine practice without moving his

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lips. We were only 50% confident of our escape but when we surrender to God, the situation could be favorable. As usual, my spouse performed a ritual before his departure praying for his life and our family.

That night, my father did not sleep in fact was reciting 'Hanuman Chalisa' without break till 5.30 morning of 13th March, 1990. To our good luck, with the blessings of Sri Hanumanji, we could see Sadanand in our home around 5.45 in the morning and all of us got excited as if we had seen him after a gap of many years. He was mum while we were expressing excitement, then he quietly showed us his house key returned by intruders.

This was a signal for us to assume that we were presumably safe and made us to jump with jubilation, only good athlete could have done with a loud laughter thereafter, my father hugged me with tears in his eyes and started weeping like a child.

Virtually, I had to calm him down, slowly to cool his emotions which got outburst as he was not allowed to speak to anybody on this issue. He was absolute transparent in his nature as such, his confinement and required restrictions were like a biggest punishment for him in life. This must have surely harmed his health in a big way, which was realised by us in later years.

On 14th March, 1990 as per plan, old couple arrived from Gulf while as, we were advised not to come to Airport to receive them. They reached their home around 10.30 in the morning and we were impatiently waiting in their house and received them in podium. Thereafter, as per plan whispered to them individually before getting into their house, not to talk anything except general welfare fearing our son should not be party to this discussion as he would have been caught unaware.

Our true well-wishers, old couple followed our request vehemently and we were pleased with their gesture. Since the talks were general in nature as such, we did not discuss anything

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about this episode. First day, we had a fine get together after a gap of around 2 months. From next day onwards we asked Sadanand to open his first floor rooms and requested couple to use those rooms only for speaking specifics, fearing those intruders might have installed some electronic equipment in a concealed form in their family sitting room which they were occupying for most of the nights. Our apprehension was that they would like to be privy to our conversations so that they could take preventive action, in case we would have dared to do something inimical to their interests.

It took us one full week to ascertain whether any miniature electronic gadgets were concealed and we never took any chance to discuss anything over there except general topics for some time.

To our surprise, even our parents did not reveal anything about our agony to the old couple. Things started getting normal even though we had suffered a lot beyond ones indignation.

We requested them not to allow Sadanand to go outside for some time till things get subdued. As per our apprehension, desperados' biggest fear would have been Sadanand who was an eye witness to entire big Saga, as chances were, they could have eliminated him for concealing their massive despicable operations.

We were cautious and did not allow Sadanand to go outside and restricted his movements within these two houses only. Days passed, my request to my parents & old couple was to keep mum and not to reveal anything of this sort for years to come. That was only our safety, so they followed very faithfully and in fact, we are indebted to them for this act of courage and perseverance.

In spite of vulnerability of any mishap, it was beyond our belief to watch old couple getting settled in their own house and we also started normal life. In the meantime, the commotion in the city started getting magnified and killing of innocent people

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was rapid, which forced most of the general public to stay indoors.

One fine day while going through the local Urdu newspaper, we saw that militant organisation had given a call to minorities to leave Kashmir with immediate effect, otherwise they may have to face bullets. This news came to us out of the blue and we decided jointly that we should move to Jammu immediately as we had hardly come out of clutches of the disgruntled elements and more so most of our relatives & friends had already left in an unprecedented situation, which we later realised was a mass exodus.

My father took responsibility to arrange a truck which could ferry Sadanand in a disguise to avoid any mishap and other members of the family also joined him with some important luggage. In the meantime, my worry was not to abandon my car because of two reasons firstly, it was purchased through Bank loan, if disposed off, could free me from loan obligation and secondly could serve us as best option for easy mobility in the hour of crises. Due to recent turmoil & fear, it was just not possible for me to drive hilly terrain of 350 kms, moreover, condition of car was also not so dependable.

We located a taxi driver who was living nearby and approached him in the night fearing somebody should not see and requested him, if he could take us to Jammu in our car. He agreed immediately as there was no business because of winter and frequent curfews due to civil unrest. He kept one condition that he has to be paid Rs 500/- for this service and would like to carry his sister along with him. Paying Rs 500/- for this service was a good amount at that time.

Finally, one fine day was selected to see final depart to our mother land and it was decided this information should be kept very confidential. Incidentally, my father arranged truck on the same day and midnight my parents, Sadanand, our associate old couple boarded the truck with few belongings and were taken by the driver in a huff to avoid neighbors & disgruntled elements. We were worried to ferry Sadanand as he was now a potential

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threat to those unknown elements, who were working behind the scene.

It was a very sad and pathetic moment for us to see our old parents leaving their mother land in dismay and that too in a truck which used to carry materials. It was an exodus in most discreet form.

Our car driver came at around 3.30 am early morning to avoid people around. We loaded few important belongings in the car dickey while as, roof of the car was not deliberately loaded so that people could not doubt us leaving the place for a long run. In the process my-self & son sat in car and were waiting for my spouse to join us as she was trying to put a pedestal lock on the main gate. It took few minutes for her to come out and the driver was getting panicky as it was getting late at 3.45 in the morning because he wanted nobody should see us leaving as it was time for residents to come out shortly before dawn to visit prayer halls, which was a normal practice at that time.

I came out of car and approached towards my spouse to find the reason about her delay and to my surprise she was struggling to put lock in place as its keys had developed little rust, unused from quite some time as such, was finding difficult to lock. As time was passing, I decided in a huff to throw keys out of my reach in a nearby field, pushed her inside the car and left the main gate of the house in an unlocked condition.

As car started moving, I got little relieved, then tried to calm down my spouse who got disturbed with my unwarranted action and requested her to forget about that happening as we ourselves were not sure whether we would be able to come back to our place. In our absence, if any burglar tries to come to our house, simple lock should not be an impediment for him to do his job.

As we were now settling down in the car for a long journey, after an hour or so, observed my spouse who was on the back seat little uncomfortable, jiggling her vanity bag and asked her what happened and again to my surprise it seems she was

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searching bunch of keys pertaining to our internal rooms, doors and cup-boards of our home and requested me to see, if by any chance that bunch of keys could be in my jacket or trouser pockets. After a struggle for few minutes, we discovered that bunch of keys we were looking for, had been left in a huff on the podium near our main gate. Oh! My God, feeble voice emanated from her and left her dumb for an hour or so.

Car was moving fast as it was run by a professional driver but suddenly it stopped after driving around 40 kms, due to some technical snag, leaving us worried for some time and after struggling for half an hour, we again started moving with mixed feelings with utter silence, as it was a journey without knowing our destination.

While passing through wet farms and lands, I recollected my long drives as we used to visit one Muslim hermit, a pious soul, in search of attaining inner peace. We had almost traveled for 2 hours and were nearing to this sacred place where this hermit was living, I requested quietly driver to turn towards that hamlet which was around 1 km inside from the main highway. He obliged and within minutes we were with that realised hermit. He was alone in his big prayer hall, which normally used to be thriving with hundreds of devotees.

On seeing us, he instantaneously said that he was waiting for we people only. Nothing to worry may be, it is God's wish and never mind as you are leaving for good along with your child. With those few words, he asked us to leave and blessed us by shaking his hands in a warmly manner. His words were very soothing and it looked, as if he was well aware about our sufferings. With this meeting, we were relieved and felt as if there was no physical and mental fatigue, carrying from quite some time. We felt, we were blessed by almighty in his form and probably leaving for better. This gave us sense of confidence and motivation for life.

While passing through the hilly track, we were looking for the truck which was carrying our parents, acquaintance and Sadanand, to find out whether by any chance, he was held up

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anywhere on the national highway. We steered through 3.5 kms long Jawahar tunnel which is considered a land mark, a last mile stone of the Kashmir valley with a sigh of relief believing it to be end of influence area of militants who were predominate in the valley.

Now, we started looking for some food and were feeling real appetite after a break of around 2 months and asked my spouse jokingly whether she was carrying any food stuff with her, she was non-affirmative with a smile on her face after many months.

Thereafter 2 hrs drive, we were in Batoth, a small helmet, well known stopover to have lunch and fill the fuel to car. Now, we were feeling little comfortable after a long time. At 6 in the evening, we arrived Jammu safely and met our parents who were waiting for us in a meeting place, which my father had chosen cautiously. It was my father's head office, located in Jammu central place.

By then, my father got un-loaded luggage from their truck and we were allotted some little store room to stay. We had quiet dinner and took night shelter in my father's office, which gave us feeling of a refugee for the first time.

Next day morning, we visited our relatives and had lunch with them. In the meantime, my father was asked by the owner of the company to continue his job in their Jammu office and was provided small place in their courtyard, sufficient for 2 persons living.

Everybody in the family started apparently forgetting the recent episode, full of miserable conditions, and now, new challenge was to look for livelihood, shelter etc. virtually it was looking start of a new life without any support.

Sadanand's continued presence in Jammu was bothering us and was paramount at that stage. We took our acquaintances into confidence and made them to understand that his presence in Jammu being hardly far off from Kashmir, may pose threat to our lives, as such; we had to somehow take away Sadanand

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from that environment at least, temporarily till the dust would get settled.

We decided jointly to take Sadanand away from the region to some distant place. In the course of few days, it was finalised Sadanand and his so called parents cum care takers would leave Jammu and go to deep western border of the country, where in a small town one of their close relative was settled. So, with this I felt my moral responsibility was over and in a way was feeling happy within inside without expressing to my other family members.

Now, after settling my parents, Sadanand & acquaintance, we decided to take our son to Jaipur, where he could live with my sister temporarily so that his schooling would not get affected. With an emotional farewell to our son who was hardily 10 years old, it was with these melancholically feelings, we left for Jaipur via Delhi, where our temporary shelter was arranged with one of our close relative. Being a metro city, we had a chance to get better employment. We had to struggle for 3 months, till I got fresh lease of life by restoring my work with some reputed company in deep southern part of country, where we live today with deep memories of past and looking forward to new life and elevated soul searching.

In the course of 20 years the stress level which was inherited in 1990, exploded in a dramatic way in the 10th year after forced migration when I suffered a heart stroke in office without any earlier symptoms forced my doctors, to put me on pacemaker, which has to be used for life time.

My mother in the same year had a massive heart attack and was saved by timely medical intervention namely angioplasty with no symptoms, no family history with a middle class food habits. Even my spouse also developed some health issues. Doctors have attributed all these ailments to deep rooted stress.

In spite of all this traumatic experience, we remained silent and never made any panic or shared with anybody expect with very few close relatives who were little keen on this issue. The

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purpose was clear to send positive energy to everybody so that our faith in Almighty upholds the dignity of life.

I personally owe this life to my Almighty for sending Sadanand to save us from clutches of miseries, which were thrust upon us by destiny and Sadanand became omnipotent into our lives since then and secondly to my dearest father who had a motto in life to work for others, my silent mother nodding her head with sublimity and above all my spouse who I believe God has sent her here for me only, her support and perseverance is my life's bonanza.

My son, Deepak was a tiny boy at that time as such, he did not know anything on this subject, may be this tale will make him aware now. His innocent contribution at that time was to live with my sister for complete one year without parents around. No doubt, we were missing him a lot but had satisfaction that he was in safe hands. It seems, sometime he would weep sobbingly in absence of his cousins on their house terrace.

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CHAPTER 2

WHO IS SADANAND?

Six years old boy, fighting for his identity in a big household of a corporate house, where around tens of young boys and adults were working as domestic helpers, was located by Joseph, a chauffeur working in the same corporate house, who had access to interior of their domestic life, due to nature of his job.

Joseph would watch this young boy struggling almost on daily basis to keep pace with his fellow colleagues who were quite senior to him and being an alien was his biggest handicap and more than that his tender age of just 6 years. The pathetic condition of this young boy was making Joseph uncomfortable while watching him in that condition for almost 6 months. Thereafter, one day desperately he approached Jeaneth, an export Manager who was also working for the same company and pleaded with him to save this tiny life from his despondent condition.

Same evening Jeaneth discussed this issue with his family members and after getting their approval, the very next day this tiny boy was rescued and brought into their house. When the family members asked this boy about his name, he could hardly pronounce his name but in a feeble voice with a broken dialect said "Sadananda". So on this day he was born as Sadanand, a pet name.

Slowly, boy started getting involved in the household work. He would help family members in some meek work and started becoming darling of every member. The family was hardly husband and wife and one way family's numerical strength gave them a confidence and a purpose to enjoy family life.

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Slowly, the boy started sharing information about his tiny life with the family members once he gained confidence in them. It seems, he was born from a Nepalese mother, fathered by a laborer from some village in Bihar. To his bad luck, his father died at early age due to some illness and mother being quite young was left with two small children, Sadanand was one among them. She had no income to feed her children but only a small hutment to live in.

This made her vulnerable for second marriage leaving children to their fate. Children were left in their hut and next day their father's brother took mercy on them and started feeding them for few months. Since entire family was daily wage laborers, they started encouraging these children to work as child laborer. One fine day his uncle left home along with Sadanand and few more young boys in search of job leaving other sibling in home being a girl child. After few weeks, Sadanand found himself in an apple orchard with some local laborer, who was working as a guard.

It seems, Sadanand's uncle had told him to wait on some pavement as he would fetch some food stuff for him but he never returned, and this boy was left to his fate. Thereafter, somebody took him to an apple orchard as a helper. This orchard was in some village near Srinagar, Kashmir which belonged to same corporate house where Sadanand was employed as a domestic helper and wherefrom he was later rescued.

Since, Sadanand was too young at the time his uncle deserted him in an alien place like Kashmir, did not remember anything more and it looks his uncle must have sold him for a petty amount to some labor contractor. Rest is history. He was neither knowing name of his parents nor the village where he was born. Even he does not remember the face of his parents or his uncle who deserted him.

Jeaneth and his family became his God sent souls to take care of his life in early age and eventually young adult with aspiration to live and make his life on his own terms.

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CHAPTER 3

"MAJAY" MY CHILDHOOD MUSLIM FRIEND

I was hardly 10 years old when we shifted from urban center to a Tehsil center namely "Bandipur" a small town in north Kashmir valley where my father was transferred as head 'Food & supplies department' working for Jammu & Kashmir Government wherein mainly rice and other food grains used to be supplied to general public under public distribution system. Since Food & supplies department was considered at that time a prize posting, my father was commanding good respect among elite of the town which made us to land in a good brand new modern palatial house with the help of his junior colleague, whose family owned the house.

The house was so big, we hardly could utilise the whole floor space even though all rooms were well furnished. The owners of the house were living opposite to our house which was a normal conventional house with no modern amenities, just a simple rural life style. It was wonderful to note the owner who was a rich & affluent, elder brother of my father's junior colleague, never aspired to be in the new house. He constructed this house for comfort of his children, who were hardly school going boys and wanted them to use this house when they would start their respective families, which would have taken them minimum 5 to 10 years to reach that stage. It was mainly a prestige and flow of money supply which made them to construct this house. Since my father was boss of owner's younger brother, who were living in a joint family were pleased

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to offer us this house free of rent along with regular supply of essential commodities, though we would desist initially.

We were five members in our family comprising my parents, Grandmother and dear sister, who is just two years younger to me. It was wonderful life with happy memories and would attract still my attention even though this story is now 60 years old. My parents were always quite loving and caring but what is more memorable is my remembrance of love and care which we were equally getting from the owners of house where we were living. The entire family, a devout Muslim by core of their heart, was as big as 30 members including men, women and children, would hug us and offer happily any food stuff which would be ready in their kitchen, as if we were part of their family.

This family had many children of different age groups, out of which, I somehow developed affinity with Majeed Mir and Saffudin Mir (cousins) as they were of my age group. Majeed whose nick name was "Majay" was affable, thin and fair complexioned boy like me. My grandmother and mother used to like him a lot. At that time, we were hardly ten years old running around, playing games in the nearby playground. We were not playing cricket, football or any other well-known games but "Guli /Danda" which was common in rural areas, was also our favourite game.

Majay somehow used to land in our home almost daily, after our routine retirement from playing wherein my mother used to offer him one full glass of milk with an egg or any other palatable food stuff which both of us used to enjoy along with Saff occasionally, "Saff" was a nick name of Saffudin Mir, cousin of Majay but would mingle with us rarely.

Even though, we were going to different schools but would meet daily in our common play ground after schooling, which gradually made our bonding strong.

This bonding became so strong that Majay & myself would hardly enjoy separation and even after our routine playing, he

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would again come to our house for doing his school home work along with me.

Occasionally, I used to visit Majay's house which was just across to find out, if he would be late to join for playing or doing homework. There his parents especially, mother would not leave me unless she would feed me with glass of milk or some fruits or even some good dish like a loaf made from corn flour, which I used to cherish a lot.

I vividly remember, our nearby neighbors would view our relation with pride as two young kids of different faiths were moving together. Even Majay would encourage me to enter their community mosque whenever he was going there to offer his prayers to almighty and surely, I also learnt little acrobatic postures of "Nimaz Shareef" very innocently and for me more attraction to enter the mosque in winter days would be to experience hot steam water bath from their "Hamam," which means conventional community hot water bath.

It is amazing for me to remember that local Muslim residents never objected of my joining in their prayers & taking bath from their Hamam even though they were aware of my antecedents. Probably they were magnanimous to my overtones because of pure adolescences.

Slowly, our relation became so strong that whenever my father used to be on official tours, my mother and grandmother would encourage Majay to stay in our house for night, as a security shield. It would be fascinating for me on the day whenever we used to share the bed because my grandmother would become taleteller up to late night, till we fall asleep.

This relation of two different families of separate faiths reached to greater heights in a more positive way and we two young kids became the main source of prime movers for bonding the strong relation.

One fine day, my father got transfer order after a gap of almost 2 years and we were forced to leave the place. I still remember nostalgic and innocent face of dear Majay who send

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us off at bus station along with his entire family and also handed over wonderful gifts. That was my last meeting with Majay and thereafter, the connection got seized by the hostilities of time and fortune.

But, how can I forget in my life beloved friend Majay and his entire family even though I had my childhood experience with the family for hardly 20 months? They were considerate Muslims and we both families shared each other's festivals & traditions almost like a big family and can't be forgotten even after such a lapse of time. MY belief is that during those times it was not a unique situation where both communities were living in most harmony.

This story is remembered by me after a gap of 60 odd years when I see now turpitude of mistrust between communities and hostilities in the region, which puts me into tremendous agony. This is painful to know that some young generation do not even know about existence of Hindus in Kashmir as sometime back, I saw innocent young Muslim kids from Kashmir speaking to the then, reputed, TV journalist, Ms Barkha Dutt of NDTV 24x7, news channel wherein they said that they have heard from their elders that there used to live Hindus in Kashmir, who were so good and can't be forgotten.

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CHAPTER 4

MISNOMERS IN PRESENT CONTEXT

The present crises in Kashmir are attributed to terrorism and unrest due to vested interested countries & few groups within India engineered and sponsored long drawn adventurism in the garb of faith. Administrators & policy makers consider this mere a law and order problem and want to root it out by proper policing and adopting military options.

May be, it is apparently true but crux has to be understood in a different way, even though, vested interests want to keep this problem alive for ever till they achieve their nefarious design. Kashmir has a long history and uniqueness in the serene boundaries, which makes it different from the rest of country or for that matter world over.

If proper survey is done by some non-partisan NGO without any publicity or fun fare, one could find astonishingly that majority of the people are interested in having peace and tranquility. Whereas, only handful of people who are disgruntled due to some coercion or fundamentals in nature, would be working for those people who want to destabilise the whole region. There could be some political differences and perceptions which force certain people to opt for vandalism and disbelief but majority believe in tranquility.

The vested interests want gradually spoil the brotherhood fabric which is inherent in the blood from centuries, by their false propaganda and adopting coercive means with utmost duplicity.

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I would have appreciated a focused & long term policy should have been adopted based on purity, love and passion, which needs to be propagated in a real sense by adopting latest communication technologies in a transparent manner so that it reaches masses, who could derive benefits and should be exposed to reality checks happening across besides helping economically and freeing them from clutches of hypocrisy, mistrust and violence.

Within local population, some peace loving pressure groups could be encouraged to emerge and to take up this task on missionary basis so that it could reach to general public in the real sense. This could be seen by majority as a helping hand to provide them succor and eventually will change their mind set based on realities and fact file which should be taken on long term basis.

By adopting this methodology, we will have different Kashmir which could be a torch bearer for the whole world for humanity, love and peace, which once Mahatma Gandhi had seen in Kashmir during the bloodshed throughout country in the year 1947, post partition in independent emerging India

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CHAPTER 5

LEGACY OF REAL KASHMIR

Kashmir has a legacy of peace, tranquility, brotherhood with special flavor of hospitality.

Visitors ordinary or distinguished, who have been visiting Kashmir from many centuries, have expressed their sweet memories in their reports.

Hiuen Tsang from China who travelled to India for the first time during 7th century has written in his book "Si-yu-ki" about Kashmir and Buddhism and its power of divinity.

Also, in Rajatarangini, a notable book written by Kalhan in mid-12th century, these sentiments have been depicted in abundance.

Kashmir is basically a land of Rishis, hermits & Sofi's who wanted to achieve lasting peace in life. It has that blood which is still running in the general people of this wonderful land.

We need a direction to save this land from bloodshed and treachery. As per my prophecy, somebody may emerge from the masses, who will take a leadership and stir the people from the present turmoil in a peaceful manner.

People with different faiths have lived together from centuries and it has a unique character to make us feel profound and distinguished, in this land of Oneness.

To illustrate, in Kashmir we have a revered famous Hindu shrine in Tulmullah known as "Kheer Bhwani".In this shrine, there is one divine spring where especially Hindus never venture in the shrine after having non-vegetarian food and even Muslims especially locals also enter the temple in the same spirit and with

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utmost devotion, the way Hindus do. Similarly, one more shrine is in Gulmarg dedicated to one Muslim saint known as "Baba Rishi" where both Muslims and Hindus visit and likewise there are so many other shrines where people with both faiths visit with devotion and respect.

Kashmir being land of hermits, yogis & Sufi's who are in search of eternal truth, some keep their identity confidential while as some become active part of society who surprisingly come from both communities viz Hindus and Muslims wherein most of the cases their disciples are from general society, who reap benefits in order to realise self.

Kashmir has a potential to lead the world in this 21st century to achieve real peace with utter austerity, non-violent means and no way for jingoism. Peace & normalcy can very well be achieved with positivity and reverence to Kashmir's fundamental culture.

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I am graciously thankful to my spouse Girja who has been my inspiration and support especially during those days when the book was being perceived and later helped me in putting those thoughts in a perspective.

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My well-deserved thanks with honesty go to my father-in-law, Mr. N.N Mattoo, whose contribution to tailor this tale at a right time, changed its discourse to its logical end.

I would like to pay my gratitude posthumously to my beloved father Mr. Arjannath who stood by me like a rock in crises, accepting my adopted strategy though he would differ with me in some critical situations. His magnanimous approach in his life has remained thought provoking for me even now as well. I am confident his soul must be in peace.

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Omkar Safapuri

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Omkar Safapuri (Omkar Nath Safapuri Kaul/ONS Kaul) popularly known as Safapuri is fundamentally a precision engineering technocrat with an industrial managerial acumen switched over to knowledge management by choice in 2003 and continues to network knowledge resources to the desired seekers of knowledge by associating itself with DELNET a network resources sharing entity based in New Delhi, India, largest library net-work organization in south Asia and internationally 2nd largest library net-work after OCLC, Ohio, USA, a non-profit institution bestowed with prestigious "IIPA- Award for Excellence in Public Service-2020"

His objective is to help knowledge seekers especially in rural India where accessing resources are scarce thus contributing to society in general in its own subtle and humble way.

Widely travelled in India and abroad has studied life from different perspective and believes a person is born to contribute back to society at some point in the best possible way one can, in any form, with a productive and positive mindset, in a pursuit of sustainable happiness.

This book represents the memories both pleasant and depraved of author before saying goodbye to Kashmir, his birthplace during April 1990 due to mass exodus by a minority community in view of communal disharmony and mistrust created by vested interests in the society in order to gain Ethnic Cleansing.

The main theme of this book is an expression to implore the reader how crises can be nullified without panic and by mere articulation; lives can be saved from un-known intruders. Narration in the book by author is conceptualizing an un-told tale suppressed by him from last thirty years and time has now come to vent those hidden emotions in the form of this book.

Learning is a continuous process of life and re-learning and experiencing might be a boon to one's life and then surrendering to Almighty with all humility, could be a challenge to self especially when one is surrounded with dangers and un-certainty.

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